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BROTHER ALECK.

BY
NELLIE LARUE BROWN.

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY,

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BROTHER ALECK.

THE VILLAGE.

Where Dix River joins Kentucky, that between the purple hills
Wanders, gathering to its bosom many sunlit sparkling rills,
As a mother does her children; here a quaint old ferry plies
Back and forth on bright blue waters overreached by bluer skies;
Here, one mile from High Bridge Station, where the locomotive shrill
Shrieks and stops, a Shaker village, by the name of Pleasant Hill,
Crowns a bold and rugged bluff, about whose steep ascent there winds
A white roadway like a ribbon, that together loosely binds
Dainty wild flowers in profusion, larkspur, roses, woodbine, mint,
That embroider both the roadsides, and of Eden perfumes hint.
Four great mansions mark the village, called North, Center, East and West,

With across the road "the office," where abides the sometime guest;
Massive piles of masonry, thick-walled, rough-hewn, of granite gray,
With broad, graceful, winding stairways that the builders meant to stay;
Oaken rafters, lofty ceilings, broad-silled windows, polished floors,
And old-fashioned, showy flower-beds neatly kept before the doors.

THE CARE-TAKER.

Here one evening, just at sunset, at a little whitewashed gate,
I met Brother Aleck first; he stopped and stepped aside to wait
Till I passed him on the flag-stone, when he bowed and gravely smiled,
As I spoke in recognition of a courtesy beguiled
From this reticent disciple of the woman Christ, Anne Lee,
Bound by conscientious scruples in the gentler sex to see
Only charms such as Grace Darling or sweet Florence Nightingale

Made divine; yet Nature planned him not to keep within the pale
Of such merciless seclusion. He who had no childhood known,
This care-taker of the village, like a king upon the throne,
Swayed the hearts of all the children that came drifting to the place,
For they read a hearty welcome in his handsome, manly face;
Of a chaste and noble type, with waving locks of dark-brown hair
That he tried in vain to brush back from a forehead full and fair;
Sunburnt cheeks swept by long lashes, solemn eyes of somber gray,
Out whose depths joy seldom shone, yet no one ever turned away
Without glancing at them twice; they seemed as if in silent quest
Of a love that was denied when parted from his mother's breast;
Perfect nose, decided chin, full lips that Cupid had not missed,
Arching with a ruddy bow; God made such lips but to be kissed
By a tender, loving woman. Can it be such ever grew
In this staid old Shaker village? Wait and hear my story through.

THE SINGING-SCHOOL.

That same evening after supper, in a low wainscoted hall,
Where the shadows cast by lamplight came and went upon the wall,
As at singing-school we gathered, Brother Aleck softly played,
While we listened to the service rendered by a Shaker maid.
A sweet, simple frock she wore; a snowy neckerchief was spread
Round about her shapely shoulders; from the cap upon her head
Here and there strayed sunny ringlets, as if meaning to defy
Sister Jane, the maiden eldress, who with keen, observant eye
Closely guarded Brother Aleck. Twice already from the fold
Had he wandered, seeking something, until fate, perhaps, made bold
By deep pity for his longing, had me to the village sent
To discern it and to teach him what such restless longing meant.
She, the maid, sang on of love, pure love of the platonic kind,

But she somehow as she sang the words the sentiment entwined
About Brother Aleck's heart-strings. I, who saw it at a glance,
When the singing-school was over, and he offered as by chance
To escort me to my doorway, slyly slipped through hers my arm,
And we three walked up the flag-stones, gaily chatting of the farm.
Then I lived my fond youth over, when with passion at its height
I had known the bliss of loving, never asking was it right.
Did I say "we three together?" I am sure we were but two,
For that he and she were one at heart my woman's instinct knew.
He was courting me for her; also for him was I caressed.
Yet I walked a willing dupe, if by such schemes could be repressed
Sweet, suspicious Sister Jane, who loitered patiently behind,
Hoping she might draw him off, although she would not be unkind
Unto me, her guest. Dear Sister Jane, pure-hearted Shakeress,
You have nobly done your duty, but you also will confess
I outwitted you, because I worked upon my Maker's plan,

Who created lovely woman as a helpmeet unto man.
'Twas for this I fell behind when we had almost reached the gate,
And assisted you upstairs, contriving, though the hour was late,
That the two might in the starlight bid each other one "good-night"
But to have my plan frustrated all because it was not quite
Just according to the custom that prevailed in Shakerdom,
For I soon heard Kitty answer you, "Don't call again; I'll come."

SHAKER MEETING.

I have been to Shaker meeting, and I've seen the spirit, too.
Move long lines of straw-scooped sisters and their brethren dressed in blue,
Bright and early Sunday morning, as they marched in single file,
Waving to and fro uplifted palms; ah, me, I could but smile
At ingenious Brother Aleck, as he covertly would glance
At shy Kitty as she passed him in the would-be solemn dance;
And I've sung at Shaker meeting, o'er and o'er the same refrain,
Wondering why those stupid sisters could not see it just as plain
As I did, that Brother Aleck, madly loved shy Kitty Hinds;
Was it that they chose to hide just what they thought within their minds?

THE BROOM SHOP.

In the village was a broom shop—a low cottage of red brick—
Where young Cupid held high court when e'er the roses blossomed thick
Round about the trellised windows; here Norwegian, Dane, and Swede
Were kept busy making brooms, with Brother Aleck in the lead.
Do you use the genuine Shaker? If you do, perhaps your broom
Brother Aleck sewed and tied while we one morning at the loom
Planned a ramble; Kitty, to the fields with dinner bucket sent,
Stopped and chatted at the window, as she o'er the roses bent.

THE FULLING MILL.

Down the deep ravine we wandered that rare summer afternoon,
Nor did Aleck ask permission of the prating Shaker loon,
Elder Black, the village ruler, but as one who did not care
Walked off with him looking at us, while there burst upon the air
Shouts of laughter from the youngsters at a broom hand, who, with art,
Said just so Napoleon heard it: "Greater far than Bonaparte
Is Napoleon Black, because he, not from any vain ambition,
But from pure, religious motives, in a fit of deep contrition,
Made grass-widow of his second wife, and came here to preside;
Has he not St. Paul obeyed, and us, his members, mortified?"
We walked on, knee deep in clover, then breast high amid the grain.
Till we reached a wooded streamlet to which ran a winding lane.
It was Kitty's favorite haunt; she, too, had climbed the garden fence,
And, not knowing we were near her, in her girlish innocence

She had pulled off shoes and stockings just above the fulling mill,
And, barefooted, waded in to where the waters dashed at will
Over rocks in wild cascades that once had turned the water wheel,
And as she her footing missed, unable longer to conceal
His devotion to the maiden, Brother Aleck sprang and caught
Her about the waist, and quickly to her cheeks the roses brought
As he kissed her three times over. Do you think with ill intent?
If so, Kitty differed with you, for she gave as good as sent—
So I heard. Just then I hid within a densely shaded nook,
For love kisses, like raw oysters, taste much better than they look.
When to reach the bank she asked him would he give to her his hand;
He replied, as if pretending that he did not understand
Her frank words, "Since you have asked, I give my hand with all my heart;"
Yet she, nothing daunted, answered "I advise you not to part
With such very useful members till you're laid out on the shelf,
But so soon as you're worth asking I shall ask you for yourself."

THE CAMP-MEETING.

Ten days later, when camp-meeting hard by High Bridge had begun,
Kitty at the country tavern, long before the rising sun
Had with purple flushed the east, began her round as chamber-maid;
Meanwhile in a distant city Brother Aleck plied his trade,
And now that the two together have by industry and care
Garnered wealth another summer, I, in answer to their prayer,
Find them both at High Bridge camp-ground. Sister Jane is with us, too,
Though she does not know precisely just the proper thing to do.
Yet had you beheld the joy with which she quaffed the wedding cup
You, like she, had pardoned me, who never gave my project up,
Till another camp broke singing, "Blest Be the Tie That Binds,"
And the preacher blest in wedlock Aleck Sprague and Kitty Hinds.

ENVOY.

You may call me married flirt, coquette or giddy chaperone,
You who read my story; but if you are honest you will own,
Since peace-makers, as God's children, reap on earth beatitude,
Not less they who make love matches merit lasting gratitude.

FLIRTATION.

• She lifts back the window curtain,
 He closes the gate below,
She smiles—a coquette—I am certain;
 His eyes take a tender glow.

Will it be thus after marriage?
Will they play at sweethearts through life?
Listen you who would true love disparage,
 They have flirted for years—that's his wife.

—*New England Magazine.*



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